

JANUARY 9, 1978

HOROWITZ RETURNS TO CONCERT STAGE
(VOICED PIECE IN TAPE LIBRARY)

INTRO:

IN ONE OF NEW YORK'S MOST EAGERLY ANTICIPATED MUSICAL EVENTS, RUSSIAN-AMERICAN PIANIST VLADIMIR HOROWITZ RETURNED TO THE CONCERT STAGE YESTERDAY AFTER AN ABSENCE OF TWENTY-FIVE YEARS. VOA'S LYN FARMER WAS IN NEW YORK'S CARNEGIE HALL TO HEAR THE CONCERT AND HAS THIS REPORT.

ANNCR:

(OPT) THE ANNOUNCEMENT A FEW MONTHS AGO THAT VLADIMIR HOROWITZ WOULD CELEBRATE THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS AMERICAN DEBUT BY PERFORMING RACHMANINOFF'S THIRD PIANO CONCERTO WITH THE NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC BOTH SURPRISED AND DELIGHTED THE MUSIC WORLD. ANY FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY CONCERT IS CAUSE FOR EXCITEMENT, BUT THIS WENT FAR BEYOND AN ORDINARY ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION. THOUGH HE WOULD, ON OCCASION, GIVE SOLO RECITALS, HOROWITZ, ONE OF THE LAST GREAT EXPONENTS OF WHAT IS OFTEN TERMED THE "GOLDEN AGE" OF THE PIANO, HAD NOT PERFORMED WITH AN ORCHESTRA FOR TWENTY-FIVE YEARS. MANY MUSIC LOVERS HAD GIVEN UP HOPE OF EVER HEARING HIM PERFORM A CONCERTO. A MASTER SHOWMAN, HE TIMED HIS RETURN EXPERTLY AND INSISTED THAT THE CONCERT, WHICH WAS A GUARANTEED SELL-OUT, BE A BENEFIT FOR THE PHILHARMONIC. THE EXPENSIVE TICKETS WERE SOLD IN HOURS. FEW EVENTS HAD CAUSED SO MUCH ANTICIPATION AND SPECULATION: WHAT WOULD HE SOUND LIKE? HAD HIS ONCE RENOWNED INTERPRETATION OF RACHMANINOFF'S CONCERTO CHANGED? AFTER ALL, HERE WAS ONE OF THE GREATEST PIANISTS IN THE WORLD COMPLETELY RELEARNING THE REPETOIRE OF HIS YOUTH. HIS CHOICE OF THE RACHMANINOFF THIRD WAS ESPECIALLY MEANINGFUL TO HIM AS WELL

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AS TO HIS AUDIENCE. IN ADDITION TO BEING THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS DEBUT IN AMERICA, THE DATE ALSO MARKED THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF HOROWITZ' MEETING WITH HIS IDOL, SERGEI RACHMANINOFF. THE TWO EXPATRIATE RUSSIANS HAD BECOME GOOD FRIENDS, AND RACHMANINOFF OFTEN SAID THAT NO ONE PLAYED THIS CONCERTO AS WELL AS HOROWITZ. (END OPT)

AT SEVENTY-THREE, VLADIMIR HOROWITZ RETAINS HIS REPUTATION AS A TEMPERMENTAL ARTIST: HE ONLY GIVES TWENTY PERFORMANCES A YEAR, ALL ON SUNDAY, ALL AT FOUR O'CLOCK. ON THE STAGE AT CARNEGIE HALL, ONE OF THIS COUNTRY'S FINEST HALLS AND ONE OF THE FEW IN WHICH HOROWITZ WILL PERFORM, A SMALL BOLT IS SCREWED INTO THE FLOOR OF THE STAGE. THIS IS THE "HOROWITZ SCREW," WHICH MARKS THE EXACT POSITION WHERE THE PIANO IS TO BE PLACED. THE INSTRUMENT, WHICH HOROWITZ REFERS TO AS "HIS BABY" WAS BROUGHT TO THE HALL FROM HIS HOME LAST WEEK. IT IS THE ONLY PIANO HE WILL PLAY.

DURING THE FIRST HALF OF THE CONCERT, THE FORTY YEAR OLD STEINWAY STOOD OFF AT THE SIDE OF THE STAGE, A GENTLE REMINDER OF WHAT WAS TO COME. EUGENE ORMANDY LED THE PHILHARMONIC IN BEETHOVEN'S "EGMONT" OVERTURE AND SEVENTH SYMPHONY, WORKS HOROWITZ HAD PERSONALLY CHOSEN TO PRECEDE HIS PERFORMANCE. BOTH THESE WORKS, SO FILLED WITH INSISTENT, AT TIMES DEMONIC, RHYTHMS HEIGHTENED THE TENSION AND ANTICIPATION AMONG THE THREE THOUSAND PEOPLE IN THE HALL TO AN ALMOST TANGIBLE LEVEL. IF EVER THE CLICHE ABOUT ELECTRICITY BEING "IN THE AIR" APPLIED, THIS WAS THE TIME.

(OPT) IT WAS A LONG INTERMISSION -- ONE MORE STROKE OF THE SHOWMAN'S GENIUS. TIME BEGAN TO BECOME UNREAL, UNIMPORTANT. PEOPLE CHATTED IN THE CARNEGIE CAFE, IN THE HALLWAYS BACKSTAGE, THE MUSICIANS TALKED NERVOUSLY, RETUNED THEIR INSTRUMENTS OR QUIETLY SMOKED. THE AUDIENCE EYED THE CHROMIUM FOREST OF MICROPHONES RCA HAD ERECTED TO RECORD THE MOMENTOUS EVENT (END OPT)

WHEN HOROWITZ FINALLY WALKED ON STAGE, THE AUDIENCE ROARED AND LEAPED TO ITS FEET. HOROWITZ'S NORMALLY IMPASSIVE FACE BROKE INTO A BROAD GRIN AS HE SURVEYED THE CROWD, HE WAVED TO THE BALCONY. BUT HE DID NOT PERMIT THE OVATION TO LAST: HE CLAPPED HIS HANDS TOGETHER AS IF TO SAY "LET'S GET ON WITH THIS," SAT DOWN AND LOOKED UP AT ORMANDY.

RACHMANINOFF'S THIRD PIANO CONCERTO BEGINS WITH THE BRIEFEST OF ORCHESTRAL INTRODUCTIONS, AND THEN THE PIANO ENTERS. THESE WERE THE NOTES FOR WHICH EVERYONE HAD WAITED, FOR WHICH EVERYONE LEANED FORWARD IN THEIR SEATS, STRAINING TO GET A FEW MORE INCHES NEARER THE PIANO. PEOPLE WAITED FOR THE SOUND AS IF THEY EXPECTED IT WOULD SOMEHOW NOT RESEMBLE THE SOUND OF A PIANO BUT ISSUE FROM SOME INSTRUMENT POSSESSED ONLY BY HOROWITZ. THE NOTES DID, OF COURSE, COME FROM THE PIANO BUT THEY WERE DIFFERENT: TENSE, STEELY AND CONTROLLED. A SPELL WAS BEING WOVEN, SIX THOUSAND EARS WERE FASTENED TO THE KEYBOARD. SIX THOUSAND EYES WERE FOCUSED ON THE PIANIST'S FACE, WHICH WAS ORDINARILY IMPASSIVE, BUT IN ESPECIALLY WELL EXECUTED PASSAGES WOULD BREAK INTO A SMILE. AS THE CONCERTO PROGRESSED, AS HOROWITZ PERFORMED HIS MAGIC, THERE WAS A CURIOUS SENSATION OF SUSPENDED TIME -- A FEELING THAT WE WERE ALL SOMEHOW REMOVED FROM EVERYTHING BUT THE PIANO, THE ORCHESTRA AND THE MUSIC.

HOROWITZ HAD RESTORED THE MUSIC WHICH HAD ONCE BEEN TRADITIONALLY CUT FROM THE CONCERTO; EVEN THAT WASN'T ENOUGH -- NO ONE WANTED THE MUSIC TO END. BUT IT DID, IN A BLAZE OF CHORDS AND RHYTHM. THE FINAL NOTE SOUNDED, THE AUDIENCE ROSE WITH A GREAT ROAR AND FOR TEN MINUTES, ALONG WITH THE CONDUCTOR AND MUSICIANS, LOUDLY APPLAUDED HOROWITZ. IT WAS AN OVATION AT ONCE UNANIMOUS AND SINGULAR, THE AUDIENCE COLLECTIVELY OFFERING THANKS FOR INDIVIDUAL REWARDS. IT SAID "WE LOVE YOU," "WELCOME BACK" AND "YOU PLAY BETTER THAN EVER." HOROWITZ LAUGHED AND, DESPITE THE PROTESTS OF THE MUSICIANS, THE CONDUCTOR AND THE AUDIENCE, REFUSED TO PLAY AN ENCORE. "WAS THAT NOT ENOUGH?" HE ASKED. YES, AND NO, WAS THE REPLY. HE WILL PLAY AGAIN; HOROWITZ WAS BACK, AND PLANS TO CONCERTIZE WITH SOME REGULARITY NOW. HIS AGE, HIS PAST REPUTATION DO NOT MATTER -- HE IS IN MANY WAYS A NEW PIANIST ON THE SCENE, AN IDOL AT SEVENTY-FOUR. HE IS PERHAPS THE ONLY MUSICIAN IN THE WORLD WHO COULD USE HIS FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY TO LAUNCH A CAREER; BUT THEN, THERE IS ONLY ONE HOROWITZ.

BML/PBM